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Joy Beasley

Acting Associate Director, Cultural Resources Partnerships and Science
National Park Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Submitted electronically: joy_beasley@nps.gov

RE: National Park Service, proposed revisions to the National Register of Historic Places, RIN (1024-AE49)

Dear Ms. Beasley:

On behalf of the Los Angeles Conservancy, I am writing to submit comments on the proposed revisions by the National Park Service to the National Register of Historic Places. The proposed revisions would substantially impact how historic resources are nominated to the National Register of Historic Places and determined eligible. The Conservancy opposes this action as it would severely undermine the effectiveness and purpose of the National Register, the nation's leading tool to recognize the built environment and heritage of this country. The revisions are harmful and counter-intuitive to both historic preservation in policy and practice.

The rationale for making these revisions is unclear, as the National Register program has been a mainstay of the National Park Service's work for more than fifty years. Limiting its use, application and ability to help direct much-needed financial reinvestment (through Federal tax credits) into local communities is a mistake. While the stated intent is to bring regulations current with recent amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the revisions will instead inject a great deal of mistrust and potential abuses into the National Register process, and unnecessarily politicize an otherwise effective tool.

Congress's original intent for this long-standing program created an open and fair process allowing communities to directly participate and be represented in the identification and registry of historic places, afforded as part of the NHPA. The revisions would establish an unequal representation for large property owners and allow a single owner and/or Federal agency to block historic district nominations, even if a majority of property owners are fully in support. The revisions call for replacing the current counting of one vote per property owner. Changing the rules



for owner objections to nominations will jeopardize the listing of new historic districts, and therefore restrict the use of historic tax credits given most of these projects occur in National Register historic districts.

The proposed revisions essentially grant Federal agencies veto authority over listing properties whereby they can object and block a National Register listing for any reason. This will then directly undermine other processes and protections afforded through the NHPA, including Section 106. Determinations of eligibility for listing in the National Register are the primary vehicle for considering whether a property is worthy of consideration under Section 106. Under the proposed changes the federal agency, not the Keeper of the National Register, will have the ultimate say on the eligibility of a property under its jurisdiction, thereby preventing consultation on a project. This will also eliminate any appeal process if all decisions rest with Federal agencies that are generally not equipped and/or qualified to take on this level of expertise and role.

Given the potential adverse impacts of these proposed revisions on current and future generations, the Conservancy strongly recommends a thorough vetting process and consultation with various preservation partners before proceeding further. The National Park Service should fully engage national, state and local preservation agencies, especially state historic preservation officers (SHPO) and tribes, and work collaboratively to assess the purpose and need for these wide-sweeping revisions.

The Conservancy welcomes the opportunity to discuss this further and work with the National Park Service to develop revisions that strengthen -- rather than weaken or undermine -- the National Register program,

About the Los Angeles Conservancy:

The Los Angeles Conservancy is the largest local historic preservation organization in the United States, with nearly 6,000 members. Established in 1978, the Conservancy works to preserve and revitalize the significant architectural and cultural heritage of Los Angeles County through advocacy and education.

Sincerely,



Adrian Scott Fine
Director of Advocacy

cc: Preservation Action
National Trust for Historic Preservation
California Preservation Foundation

